LITERARY NEWS, VIEWS AND CRITICISM

NEW BOOKS.

A Romance Worth While.

Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer's story of "Ladies Whose Bright Eyes" (Doubleday, Page and Company) takes us back to the fourteenth century and among the knights and the ladies whose eyes, as described by Milton, are mentioned in the title. This is an amusing as well as a surprising and exciting tale. Mr. William Sorrell, the hero, was a modern publisher. He was what we may call a "progressive" in his calling, a "warm" business man, spirited, agitated, rich in contrivance; it was he who got out the encyclopædia indispensable to commuters. The story describes with excellent effect the impressions received by Mr. Sorrell as he found himself walking over Salisbury plain, dressed in what he conceived to be his nightgown, bare footed, a turban on his head and in his hand a cross obtained in Antioch and made by Joseph of Arimathea from gold spilled by the money changers when they were driven out of the temple. The wind blew; only by poetic license were the downs like velvet, and Mr. Sorrell wished with all his heart that before leaving Sandwich he had been thoughtful enough to put on trousers and shoes.

He conversed in old French, and under a distressing sense of being insufficiently clothed, with a nun who was riding on a mule and carrying a basket of eggs. She was not at all disturbed by the thirty or forty dead malefactors hanging from oak trees on the tops of hills; she rode straight under a clump of them, possibly wondering a little in her rather bovine way that the pilgrim from Antioch (his own unshakable understanding was that he had just come by a fast steamer from New York) should be at the pains to make a detour. He didn't object to the law taking its course, he explained, but he thought the publicity unpleasant. It was not very long after this that he had his bath and his fourteen course supper at the Lady Blanche d'Enguerrand de Coucy's castle at Stapleton.

The bath excited his somewhat terrified interest. It was accomplished in a wooden vat set on an elevated platform in an enclosed yard deeply and very unfragrantly littered with the rejected parts of beasts and vegetables thrown out from the kitchen. Once a year the yard was cleaned up, and it was nearly time for the cleansing when Mr. Sorrell bathed. A polite page escorted the pilgrim to the vat, helped him climb in, plugged up the vent hole in the bottom and signalled for the water, which was poured from pails into a trough leading from an upper window in the castle. It ran first hot and then cold, affording a varied and delightful sensation, and there was soap. Also the Lady Blanchemain and the Lady Amoureuse stood behind a palisade which was part of the bathing arrangement, and when it was judged that Mr. Sorrell was ready the Lady Blanchemain cried out "Ho, la! most holy pilgrim, here are your chausses," at the same time handing him things at the full stretch of her arm as she stood on tiptoe. The page pulled out the plug and Mr. Sorrell dressed himself in the vat in woollen hose, one leg white and the other red, shoes of different colors, a fine linen shirt and a checkered velvet coat with a fur edging, whereafter the page combed his hair and shaved him and the ladies approached with towels and knives and silver basins and manicured him so that his nails were like mirrors.

It was pleasant making the requested payment for these attentions. Lady Blanchemain offered her cheeks to be kissed. The Lady Amoureuse, however, would have him kiss her upon the lips, and indeed she almost swooned in ecstasy at the embrace of this holy stranger, who appeared now like a prince in glory." He considered after this experience that the fourteenth century times were not half as barbarous as he had thought. He did remark upon the condition of the kitchen yard, but the Lady Amoureuse directed his attention to the small bag of lawn with which he had been provided, the same containing dry cloves, lavender, peppercorns and other spices. If he would hold this to his nose, she said, he would find it an excellent means of relief.

The supper was magnificent, but not to his taste. He did not like for instance the dish consisting of a gilt structure of pastry shaped like a castle and filled with the tongues of rabbits, hedgehogs, deer, geese and wild boars, the breasts of partridges, the livers of pheasants, forcement balls made of honey cinnamon and flour boiled in wine, a further mixture of honey, nutmegs, cloves, garlic and mint, the whole stewed together so that no particular thing could be avoided and no mercy could befall the fastidious. No simple or dissociated viand was obtainable at the supper. The herring was boiled in white wine whey and poured over with a sweet sauce made of cherries; it gave Mr. Sorrell the distinctly unpleasant impression that he was eating strawberry jam and oysters. The morsel that he detested least was the breast of some bird that had been pickled in fermented honey and laid over with a paste of almonds and cheese. The wine was spiced with cloves. Mr. Sorrell said "Oh, my God!" as often as he tasted anything.

He must have managed to drink considerable of the wine, for when word was brought that Hugh of FitzGreville and his forty robbers were attacking the Lady Dionissia de Egerton's castle of Tamworth our publisher pilgrim, seemingly without knowing very clearly what he was about, mounted a gigantic stallion that had been carefully educated to strike and mangle human beings with its dreadful hoofs and teeth, rode all alone against the robbers, an iron mace in one hand and St. Joseph's cross in the other, left Hugh of FitzGreville a broken and formless pulp in the mire, killed four or five others with powerful blows and bites and put the others to flight, except ten, who lay fast pinned by the legs under a tree that they had been using for a battering ram.

The story is brilliant and varied, and we know of no romance that has quite as much fun with its people. We go to Newcastle at the time when the second Edward's widow (the story tells how she murdered her husband) is fighting the Scots, and there make the intimate acquaintance of the two strongest knights in the world. Most interesting knights they are. We attend afterward at a joust between two noble ladies, a real joust with spear and sword, and this is as good as the rest. The story is all good, from the smallest matters to the giant Hobokolus who stood in Ireland and picked apples in Wales.

A Redeemed Rich Man.

We are grateful to Mr. Frederick Palmer for giving a rich man's son a fair chance, as he does, in "Over the Pass" (Charles Scribner's Sons), without forcing him into the slums or into political reform, the more so that his inclination to ply the muckrake is perceptible at times, though promptly suppressed. To be sure the hero has had the advantage of five years solitude in the wilds of Arizona fighting his defective lungs, an occupation which may lead even a millionaire to do some thinking.

The Arizona part of the story is pleasing and interesting. The day of ranching and cattle is over, but irrigation now offers its excitements. The picture of the little settlement with its selected colonists is charming. We regret that bad men should appear among them, but the hero must have an opportunity to show his courage and self-restraint. In spite of some fine writing into which Mr. Palmer is tempted by the sunsets, and in spite of various opinions on literature and art which he puts into the hero's mouth, he makes that young man attractive enough to warrant his being popular with old and young in the irrigation colony and to lead the reader to wonder why the heroine keeps him off.

He is called away to try his hand in his father's big department store. There the author yields to his desire to say things about New York city and we fear that he is going to turn to sociology. Luckily for the purpose of a story he prefers melodrama. He describes very well the young man's effort to interest himself in the business and to place confidence in his father. The latter's lie to his son makes the consequences inevitable. The reader will forgive the buccaneer that Velasquez painted, and the outbursts of heredity, when he reflects that he has been spared the description of a large business conducted on altruistic principles. The young man wins hearts fast enough to draw a number of employees from the business they know about to a return to the land and the simple and independent life.

The sequel in Arizona is pure melodrama, but there is no harm in that. The fight around the waterhole is better than a legal fight for the dam rights would have been. It brings the heroine around, as it should, and leaves the hero happy after he has discarded his millions and his unworthy father. The sunset sets Mr. Palmer off again at the close. The book is pretty well written; we wish the author would take his scenery more calmly and that he would abstain from injecting cultured talk into otherwise sensible conversations. We wish too that he would respect the English language enough to abstain from "sensing" or "glimpsing" things. He has written a readable and enjoyable book all the same and has made his ethical points clear.

Three Detective Stories.

In the first and best books of detective fiction of the type that turns for its interest to the marvellous analytical powers of an all grasping mind, explained by an admiring bystander, the episodes were at least brief. The attraction for the reader in all of them lies in observing the skill with which the author unravels the tangle he has made, rather than in the crimes themselves or the material the author supplies, for these are monotonously similar as a rule. It is becoming the fashion to expand these short stories into volumes, with depressing effect unless there is dash enough in the narrative to hold the reader's attention. The three that come to us in one week, all treating of murder mysteries and all built on the conventional model, rather miss fire, though they may do for hurried summer reading.

The author of "Midnight at Mears House" (Dodd, Mead and Company), Mr. Harrison Jewell Holt, has taken pains with the construction of his mystery. In the seclusion of a country house in Maine before the summer season he gathers a remarkable number of persons who may have a motive to kill the victim. The hero and narrator is a pretty stolid lawyer, not very attractive, so that his love affairs are only mildly interesting. He is the cause of much needless repetition. The omniscient detective has the astonishing and disquieting gift of being able to tell by ear whether a person is speaking the truth or not. The actions have the unexpectedness of the old time pantomime tricks, an impression strengthened by the agility of the performers, but there is nothing in the story extraneous to the matter in hand and everything is accounted for when the story closes, which is a decided merit nowadays.

In "A Chain of Evidence" (J. B. Lippincott Company) Miss Carolyn Wells attends more strictly to business than in previous essays in this form of writing. Here again we have a middle aged lawyer muddling matters till the all seeing detective takes things in hand. The author cannot help digressing somewhat into the incidents of flat life, but she holds to her story pretty well, leading her readers in pursuit of false clues till she is ready to end her book and then springing something new on them. The callousness of the persons concerned is noticeable, even if the murdered man had serious faults. There is a love affair of course. The hero and narrator's trick of picking up unconsidered trifles wherever he finds them would be embarrassing outside of a detective story.

There is more originality in Mr. Rufus Gillmore's "The Mystery of the Second Shot" (Appletons), which is by no means so well written as the other two, though it has the advantage of not being told in the first person. Whether a man's putting himself in a position where he must be killed would relieve the insurance companies from paying his life policies under the suicide clause, as the author asserts, may be doubtful, but the idea is worked out ingeniously. The hero is a reporter, and many of his adventures are plausible at least. The story is not improved by the device of holding back the decisive evidence till the court is in session. We trust that the ethics of Boston newspaper men are not so low as this story makes out and that there is more impartiality in the prosecution of criminal cases in Massachusetts than appears in it. The author leaves many ends loose; we could dispense with the love business, but his story has go to it.

Some New Fiction.

The tone of light farce in which Miss Edith Macvane introduces her heroine in "Her Word of Honor" (Little, Brown and Company), which is sustained consistently to the end, will reassure the hero whenever matters become threatening. A young French woman with aristocratic connections, employing a Frenchified English marked with queer touches of the slang of both languages, having French ideas about marriage and the adventurous spirit of total ignorance, starts out to find people who may be friends in America. She lands in New York with $100, but is taken up and kept safe by a rich woman with social ambitions. She avoids a marriage of the French kind and makes a love match by pure luck, for neither she nor her friends show much intelligence. There are modern accessories, a capsized sailboat, an automobile, an aeroplane, a New York roof garden. The episodes are intentionally improbable and are lively, except a discussion of contract labor which is creditable neither to the young woman nor her lawyer lover. It is slight, inconsequential matter, intended for summer reading, and is cleverly done.

It is a pretty and entertaining story, in spite of much sentimentality and other faults, that Credo Harris has written in "Toby" (Small, Maynard and Company, Boston). It might be a temperance tract, for it describes the amiable hero's successful struggle against drunkenness, if it were not for the fine old gentlemen who put down their toddy, the recipe for which the author takes care to give us. The love tale winds its way through dramatic incidents of life in the Kentucky mountains; moonshiners, feuds, negroes appear in it as well as quality folks. There is a very thorough knifing, a fox hunt, and the sale of a white man at auction. We could wish that the genial, careless hero had not recovered his society manner so quickly, and that the delightful vagabond had not turned into a level headed lawyer; we could wish too that the conversion of the puritanical heroine from her high standards had been more gradual. We should have liked to see more of the old time Kentuckians and could have dispensed with the theatrical villain, who does not belong among the live people in the story. We hope the author will keep on.

If only the author of "High Bradford" (Houghton Mifflin Company), Mary Rogers Bangs, had taken a tenth of the interest in her story that she has in the antiquarian information she has accumulated. The reader will have no doubts that every particle of information with regard to places, clothes, furnishings, manners and so forth is exactly so; he may puzzle out the complicated genealogy of the persons introduced if he chooses to. The author has taken infinite pains, but she stops at every moment to explain and to tell the whole history of every person she brings in. This might be of use if she gave the real names of places and people; where both are supposed to be fictitious the process is simply confusing. The reader advances a step, only to hark back for a whole chapter to something of which he does not see the drift. The people become mere shadows without life. They are fine all the same, and we should like to know them the patriarchal sea captain, the boy who becomes King of the Cannibal Islands, the real men and women the author has in her mind. We wish she could drop her knowledge and tell of them, as Mr. Lincoln does, seriously or in fun.

It is a complaint against the hardship that the divorce laws of England work among the poor that Mr. Vincent Brown makes in "Mayfield" (Brentano's). We cannot discover what alleviation he proposes. The patient, Christian woman who is the heroine is practically forced into concubinage by her criminal husband; no divorce would make her regard her relation to the man with whom she lives in a different light; the only solution is the husband's death. The question is discussed repeatedly by a curate in the slums, his district visitor and the workingman who takes the woman under his care. Mr. Brown believes in the power of reiteration and does not allow his readers to miss his points. Both story and argument proceed by jerks; neither is improved by the repeated intrusion of a coarse young woman with her vituperation, and the maniac who is in love with her. It is the presentation of a problem rather than a picture of low life that the reader will find in the book.

The Wild West of the juveniles and of the circus lights up the pages of Mr. William MacLeod Raine's "Mavericks" (G. W. Dillingham Company). It deals chiefly with the wooing of a charming young woman by nearly every man that comes within range, including two men of character, whose chances seem to be even, and various undesirables. Incidentally there is a liberal allowance of shooting, cattle rustling, kidnapping, a fire, the holdup of a bank. The despicable villains stoop to using an automobile. The scene is the Arizona border. The reader will get his money's worth of excitement.

Nine entertaining stories about baseball men will be found in Mr. Charles E. Van Loan's "The Ten Thousand Dollar Arm" (Small, Maynard and Company). They are hardly baseball stories and contain very little of the extraordinary dialect the game has developed. They are rather sketches of character of the men who play the game; side lights on the players' lives.

A small joke is stretched out by Mr. George Barr McCutcheon into a small volume in "Her Weight in Gold" (Dodd, Mead and Company). The author wastes little invention and less refinement on it.

In writing his story of boarding school life, "The Bantam" (Harpers), Mr. Brewer Corcoran holds to all the conventions of the modern form of that sort of fiction. The school follows the British fashion of being divided into forms, it is organized in societies, admission to which is of vital importance. There is football and rowing, there are pranks and fights and feeding and remarkably little studying apparently. That is generally the case with school or college stories. The author's enthusiasm prevents his being very clear in his descriptions; he bubbles over with fun the point of which is not always clear to the reader. His story is rather disjointed, but his little hero is often really plucky, if he is merely quarrelsome at times, and most of the boys are harmless. The story will doubtless be popular at the school it depicts; it will describe one kind of American school to inquiring parents.

The Donor of Letchworth Park.

A book of more than local interest is J. N. Larned's "Life and Work of William Pryor Letchworth" (Houghton Mifflin Company). Mr. Larned, who is known as the editor of an encyclopædic history, was an almost lifelong friend of Mr. Letchworth, and he has been able to cover his biography with many personal recollections. A narrative of the long life of William Pryor Letchworth, who died at Glen Tris, in the upper Genesee Valley, fifteen months ago, is almost a record of systematic philanthropy in this State. He was president of the New York State Board of Charities for many years, but his interest in charitable undertakings was not confined to his term of service on the board nor to the set limits of that body's activities. He engaged in whatever matters he deemed to be for the improvement of the condition of the insane and criminal. His work for epileptics was recognized by the State a few years ago when a new colony in Rockland county was named Letchworth Village; and he was known also for his active interest in the correction of wayward children. A few years before his death he deeded his property at Portage, N. Y., to the State, making the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society its custodian. The gift insured to the people of the State the continued use of the land surrounding the upper falls and gorge of the Genesee River. Mr. Larned, in speaking of this estate, tells at some length of the early history of this region. The book is of intimate interest to citizens of western New York and to all who are engaged in the control of corrective institutions.

Many Lands.

Frankness is the characteristic of the sketches of Canadian life that Emily Ferguson, whose pseudonym is Janey Canuck, writes in "Open Trails" (Cassell and Company). She does not hesitate to reveal the unpleasant side of life in the Canadian Northwest, nor to say what she thinks of Toronto and other places in the East. She is not looking for fault to find and has plenty of praise for the things and the people she likes, but she does not hesitate to speak right out in meeting and to say just what she sees and a good many things she thinks. These last embrace nearly everything under the sun, for the papers digress accordingly to the author's fancy. She has a knack for showing the character of the people she meets, and in spite of a leaning to smart epigrams has written an unusual and entertaining book.

The interesting and informing book that Mr. Archibald R. Colquhoun wrote fifteen years ago on "China in Transformation" has been revised and brought up to date by the Harpers. So much that was then prophecy has come true since that the author has left most of his text as it was originally written, but he has corrected mistakes, added new information and written additional chapters on present conditions, so that his little book retains its importance as a guide to the Chinese situation.

It is gratifying to find that the preface of Angie Warren Perkins's "Our Year in Europe" (Richard G. Badger, Boston), corrects the misleading title. The book records selected impressions of many places in Europe, including Russia, Scandinavia and Spain, besides the usual travel routes; these were visited in several journeys spread over a long time. The reader should not be tempted to try to do them all in a year. The author avoids guide book information, but her experiences were not particularly novel and she does not make them very interesting. The book is illustrated.

What the point may be of the two booklets by Julian Street, published by the John Lane Company, we fail to see. "Ship-Bored" is a mildly facetious account of the usual incidents of the ocean passage written in the superior tone of a person to whom it is an old story. "Paris à la Carte" seems to be a prospectus of the hotels and restaurants favored by the author, whose taste may or may not be that of the reader. Both are illustrated with very clever drawings by May Wilson Preston, in which the artist's skill is more evident than the humor.

Andre Beaumont's Book.

Subsequent aerial feats have not yet dimmed the fame of André Beaumont's exploits last summer, the story of which he relates in "My Three Big Flights" (McBride, Nast and Company). To those who follow the aviators the chief value of the book will be as an authoritative record, for Beaumont kept a diary and sticks pretty closely to it. Others may form no idea of the greatness of the feats from his modest account of what he did day by day. He only tells of the flight from Paris to Rome, of the European circuit, in which the Channel was twice crossed, and of the duel with Védrines in the British circuit race.

Perhaps the most entertaining part of the book, as it gives some idea of Lieut. Conneau's personality, is the beginning, with the story of his fight with the navy department to obtain permission to fly and of his first lessons at Paris. He winds up with some general reflections on aviation. The book is illustrated with many photographs.

On the Principles of Bond Investment.

A book of unusual value to those who are interested financially and otherwise in the process of investment is Lawrence Chamberlain's "The Principles of Bond Investment" (Henry Holt and Company). Mr. Chamberlain is associated with a Wall Street banking house and has prepared with remarkable diligence a treatise on bonds and the principles underlying their issuance and purchase. In many places he speaks from experience or observation, and his book is written with a thorough knowledge of economic theory. Mr. Chamberlain lays unusual stress upon what he calls civil loans, under which he groups Government, State and municipal bonds. He explains that it was scarcely practicable to write a book to scale, treating all issues as extensively as their prominence in finance would justify, but that it was found better to consider in greatest detail those issues which have received scant treatment heretofore. He writes in greatest detail therefore on civil loans. Railroad finance,

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